

children. Such children are the most vulnerable group in our country, and I was active in a bipartisan group dedicated to retaining the foster care entitlement and prevention programs for abused and neglected children.

The child support enforcement provisions in the legislation are another example of positive, bipartisan efforts. And because it was bipartisan, little attention has been given to these accomplishments. But these provisions include bold action to crack down on deadbeat parents who shirk their obligation to pay child support. Currently, over \$20 billion is uncollected in child support payments and arrearages. Strengthening child support enforcement will truly help children of all income levels, and this is meaningful action to underscore the importance of families, and support children.

There has been a sincere effort to improve this bill, and the positive changes are the result of untold hours of hard work and dedication.

The key point is that the current system does not have public support or confidence, and this is not healthy for the country. The cynicism and frustration we see among Americans toward Government stems partly from their anger about welfare. Even families dependent on our existing system admit that they are frustrated and that the system can trap families into a cycle of dependency. We need to make the leap with real changes, tougher rules, and more common sense. We have an opportunity to help families and build more support for the protections that should stay in place, if the job is done right. A great deal has been promised by the architects of this bill and others such as many Governors, and I hope we will see the hard work, skill, and compassion required to bring about the right kind of results.

Today, I cast my vote for change.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, today I am forced to vote against a welfare reform measure that I believe is bad for children and bad for the State of California, costing my State billions of dollars.

This is a difficult vote for me because I stand in favor of welfare reform. I want to get people off welfare and put them to work. I voted in favor of the Senate welfare reform bill last year because I support this principle.

I also continue to support giving States additional flexibility to run their welfare programs, cracking down on deadbeat parents and reducing teen pregnancy.

COSTS TO CALIFORNIA

In California today, we have approximately 4 million legal immigrants residing in our State—40 percent of the Nation's legal immigrants. Thus, the proposed cuts in benefits to legal immigrants will have a dramatic and disproportionate impact on California, which Senator FEINSTEIN and I have quantified as best we can.

This bill saves nearly \$60 billion over 6 years. Where do these savings come

from? More than one-third of the savings will come from restricting benefits to legal immigrants. Of this amount, California will have to shoulder 40 percent of the losses. This is simply unfair to California.

It has been estimated that California's loss of Federal funds under this bill could be up to \$9 billion over 6 years due to the restrictions on benefits to legal immigrants.

This will mean a massive cost shift to California's 58 counties. For example, over half of the immigrants on Supplemental Security Income [SSI] and Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC] live in California. According to the California State Senate Office of Research, over 230,000 aged, blind and disabled legal immigrants could lose their SSI benefits almost immediately. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that 1 million poor legal immigrants would be denied Food Stamps under the bill, with many of them living in California.

If legal immigrants are made ineligible for Federal and State programs, California's counties will be responsible for providing social services and medical care to them. Under California law, counties are legally and fiscally responsible to provide a safety net to indigent persons.

The safety net is already overburdened in many counties. Some of the counties most heavily impacted by legal immigrants have already faced issues of bankruptcy. This welfare bill will only further threaten the financial viability of these counties.

The largest county in the Nation, Los Angeles County, will be severely impacted by these provisions. Los Angeles County estimates that under this bill, 93,000 legal immigrants would lose their SSI benefits in their county alone. If these legal immigrants applied for county general assistance, it would cost Los Angeles County \$236 million.

California counties further fear damage to their health system if the State exercises its option to deny all Medicaid coverage, including emergency care, to most legal immigrants.

That is why I cosponsored an amendment with my distinguished colleague from California, Senator FEINSTEIN, to mitigate some of the impact of the legal immigrant provisions on California. The Feinstein-Boxer amendment would have applied legal immigrant provisions of the bill prospectively. This would allow us to make changes for immigrants who have yet to enter the country, but keep the rules of the game unchanged for those legal immigrants already present.

I think it is important to note who some of these legal immigrants are. Many of them are children. Many of them are disabled and unable to work. Many of them are refugees, with no sponsor to fall back on if they are cut off from the assistance they desperately need. According to the California State Senate Office of Research,

approximately 60 percent of legal immigrants receiving AFDC in California are refugees.

The Feinstein-Boxer amendment would have decreased the outflow of Federal dollars from California, while maintaining what I believe is a fair approach for legal immigrants already in our country. Unfortunately, our amendment failed.

VOUCHERS FOR CHILDREN

A second reason why I cannot support this bill is the prohibition on providing vouchers for noncash items to children if their family's time limit for assistance has expired. Vouchers could be used to pay for items such as school supplies, diapers, food, clothing and other necessary items for children. An amendment to require States to give vouchers to children whose families exceed time limits shorter than 5 years did not pass in the Senate. An amendment to give States the option to do this failed as well with only two Republicans voting in favor.

I believe the bill's language goes too far to penalize children for their parents' inability to find work. What kind of country are we when we deny such necessities to innocent children?

FOOD STAMPS

In addition, the bill would make major cuts in funding to the existing Food Stamp Program. Reductions in the bill for food stamps amount to approximately \$27.5 billion over 6 years—nearly half of the bill's savings. By the year 2002, food stamp spending would be reduced by nearly 20 percent. The poorest households would be affected since nearly half of the cuts in food stamps would come from households with incomes below half of the poverty line.

CONCLUSION

The drafters of this latest welfare reform bill wisely improved certain provisions of the bill to increase child care funding, retain the Federal guarantee to school lunch programs—although funding for school lunch has been unwisely cut, and maintain child protective services for abused and neglected children.

In addition, key amendments to maintain Medicaid coverage for current welfare recipients, strike the optional food stamp block grant, and ensure Federal health and safety standards for child care successfully passed the Senate.

I wholeheartedly support all of these improvements to the underlying legislation.

However, for the reasons I have stated above, I cannot support this welfare reform bill that shifts major costs to the State of California and shreds the safety net for poor children. I hope that in conference my concerns will be addressed. One State should not be unfairly penalized as California is, and no child should suffer as a result of our work.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I will vote for the welfare reform bill before